# DOTD STP English Grammar

*July 2024*



DOTD
LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION & DEVELOPMENT

LOUISIANA TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH CENTER

# Table of Contents

## The Parts of Speech

### General Information
Parts of speech are the building blocks for the English language. Using parts of speech, you can create all sorts of amazing sentences just by putting them in different order, adding more parts of speech in, taking some parts of speech out—the possibilities are almost endless! There are **eight parts of speech** in the English language, and while most of the time you will probably not be asked to label all of them, it is important that you are familiar with each and its purpose so that you can recognize an example of each. One of the fun things about English is that a single word can act as multiple parts of speech depending on how it is used and where it is placed. This is why understanding how all of the parts function is so important; you need to be able to identify how words are being used and if their usage is actually correct.

### Noun
Nouns are one of the most common parts of speech in the English language and one of the earliest we use. For most of us, nouns are our first words. A noun will name a ** (Mary), ** (Pennsylvania), ** (cat), or ** (love). They can act as the subject in a sentence and tell a reader who or what. There are two types of nouns: common nouns and proper nouns. Nouns can be plural or singular. They can describe something concrete (something tangible that you can touch or feel) or abstract (an idea or belief). Nouns are a very important part of speech.

### Common Noun
Common nouns are just that—common. They are everywhere you look, everywhere you go. Common nouns are the **generic terms** for a class or type of thing (if you get into specifics, you may start getting into proper nouns). Because they are so common, they **do not get capitalized**. Common nouns may be singular or plural, but there is nothing about them that makes them special or stand out. Here is a brief list of common nouns:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| girl | tire | phone |
| bikes | ladybugs | mountains |
| beach | pencil | cupboard |
| birds | water | books |
| cup | rivers | painting |

### Proper Noun
Proper nouns are special. They are specifically named nouns, not just one of the crowd. Proper nouns name a particular, one-of-a-kind noun and because it is called out by name, it gets a **capitalized** first letter no matter where it appears in the sentence. Here are some examples of common nouns on the left and a proper noun example of each on the right:

| | |
|---|---|
| boy | Richard |
| beach | North Beach |
| girl | Sandra |
| planet | Neptune |
| city | Chicago |
| car | Porsche |

## Making a Plural Noun

Nouns may be singular (only one) or plural (more than one).To make a noun plural, you *usually* just add an *s*, *but* there are exceptions.

If the word ends with:

- a consonant, then *y*, drop the *y* and add *ies* (baby > babies)
- a vowel, then *y*, just add *s* (tray > trays)
- any sound close to the *s* sound (s, ss, x, z, ch, sh, etc.), add *es* (class > classes)
- a consonant, then *o*, add *es* (potato > potatoes)
- a vowel, then *o*, just add *s* (zoo > zoos)
- *f* or *fe*, change the *f* or *fe* to *ves* (half > halves)

There are also some **irregular plural** forms to watch out for, where you may have to change a letter or letters to correctly change the number. Here are a few examples:

When you make *man* plural, it becomes *men*
*woman* becomes *women*
*child* becomes *children*
*person* becomes *people*
*mouse* becomes *mice*
*tooth* becomes *teeth*

And sometimes the plural form is spelled the same as the singular form:

scissors
pants
deer
shrimp
moose

**Collective nouns** are nouns that name a whole collection or group of people or things as one cohesive (or *collective*) unit. Although technically numbering multiple things, we refer to them as a single unit:

"The team celebrated a victory." (multiple people on the team, but considered one whole)
"The army fought to keep its position." (Not an army of one, but they are working together. In this case even the pronoun *its* is singular.)

### Concrete Noun

A concrete noun is a person, place, thing, or idea that can be touched, seen, heard, smelled, or tasted. In other words, a concrete noun is something that **can be detected through one or more of our senses**. If you can point it out to someone else, it's probably a concrete noun. Concrete nouns may be plural or singular (*pools*/*swing*) and may also be common or proper (*girl*/*Mrs. Tescher*). In the previous examples, all of those people and things can be pointed out to another person.

### Abstract Noun

Abstract nouns are a little harder to describe to someone because they **cannot be detected through our senses**. Abstract nouns are generally ideas, qualities, and states of being that are not tangible (cannot be touched or held). Things like love, peace, democracy, bravery, heroism, worry, happiness—you cannot point at these things and show someone what they look like (you may be able to find examples of people who embody these qualities or ideas, but not the qualities or ideas themselves) so they are *abstract*.

### Noun Markers

Noun markers are little indicator words that let you know a noun is coming. **Articles**, **determiners**, and **quantifiers** are the three noun markers with which you should be familiar. *Articles* (*a/an/the*) are the most common markers. *The* is used to indicate a specific noun ("The cup is on the table." In this sentence, we know *cup* and *table* are our nouns because there are *the*s right before each one.) *A* is used to indicate a singular noun that starts with a consonant or a consonant *sound*. For example:

"Cheryl will wear a white dress."
"There was a one dollar bill in the washing machine."

Even though *one* starts with a vowel, it sounds like it starts with a consonant [*wun*], so *a* is used.).

*An* is used to indicate a singular noun that starts with a vowel or a vowel *sound*. As in, "Mark ordered an antique lamp for the dining room." Or, "It is an honor to make your acquaintance."

Some nouns never use an article to introduce them: names of languages, people, sports, or academic subjects, for instance.

"Xio was learning English in night school." (However, if you changed the noun *English* to be an *adjective* and added *language* as your noun, then you would use an article: "Xio was learning the English language in night school.")

"Patricia plays basketball for her high school team."
"Will you ask Polly if she wants a cracker?"

Any of the following can act as noun markers and can help you find the nouns in a sentence:

- possessive nouns (*dad's, Jill's, zookeeper's,* etc.)
- possessive pronouns (*his*, *yours*, *their*, etc.)
- numbers (*five, one*, *ten*, etc.)
- indefinite pronouns (*few*, *many*, *some*, *each*, *none,* etc.)
- demonstrative pronouns (*this*, *that*, *these*, *those*)
- quantifiers (tell how much or how many of something)

Keep in mind that adjectives can come between the noun marker and the noun it is introducing, so the noun will not always be the word directly after the marker.

### A Noun's Role in a Subject

In a complete sentence, you should be able to identify a *subject,* a *predicate* (the part of the sentence where the verb is located), and a *complete thought*. The subject will generally be a noun (with any words that modify it) and the easiest way to determine which noun is the subject (if there are multiple nouns in the sentence) is to find the verb (the action word) and ask yourself, who or what is doing this action in this sentence? The answer to that question will usually be your subject. Consider this sentence:

"The huge, old horse could run circles around younger animals."

The *subject* of this sentence is *horse* because it is doing the action: running. If you were asked to find the *complete* subject, it would be *huge, old horse* and include all the words used to modify *horse*.

### Pronoun

Pronouns are words that **replace or refer to previously mentioned nouns**. Because they refer to nouns already mentioned, it is important to use the right pronoun so that your readers do not become confused as to who or what you are talking about. We use pronouns so that sentences do not become too wordy, repetitive, or confusing. Look at this sentence, for example:

"Melanie and Melanie's sister are going to visit Melanie's uncle on a small farm Melanie's uncle owns in Minnesota and Melanie and Melanie's sister are going to stay on the uncle's farm for three weeks."

Phew! But look what happens when we replace some of those nouns with pronouns:

"Melanie and *her* sister are going to visit *their* uncle on a small farm *he* owns in Minnesota and *they* are going to stay on *his* farm for three weeks."

All of the ideas of the original sentence are still there, but by using pronouns instead of repeating *Melanie*, we cleaned up the sentence and made it easier to understand.

## Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

### Agreement in Person

Pronouns must also agree with their antecedents in terms of person. What this means is that when writing is done in the first person (*I*, *me*, *we*), you cannot switch to second person pronouns (*you*) or third person pronouns (*he*, *she*, *they*, *it*, etc.). Same rule applies if the writing is done in second or third person voice: pronouns must match the tense used. Look at this sentence as an example:

"When a person buys a used car, you get what you pay for."

Here we started in third person (*a person*) and switched to second person (*you*) when it came time to replace with a pronoun. To fix it, we want to keep all of the pronouns consistent in person with the voice already established in the sentence.

"When you buy a used car, you get what you pay for."

In this case, it was easier to change the entire sentence to second person than to change the second person pronouns to third person (that would have been a lot of *he*s and *she*s and would have made the sentence confusing).

One caveat when using pronouns is to make sure that it is clear who or what your pronouns are referring to so that meaning does not become ambiguous. For example:

"When Sean dropped the vase in the sink, it broke."

This use of pronouns is ambiguous because we really have no way of knowing if it was the vase that broke or the sink. What is the *it*?

Before you can use a pronoun, you need to set up a clear antecedent. For example:

"They should elaborate on their stance with regard to human cloning."

Who is *they*? This sentence is much better in terms of clarity:

"The candidates should elaborate on their stance with regard to human cloning. They have been vague about their position up to this point."

Now we have set up a clear antecedent and identified who should elaborate on their stance so that *candidates* can now be replaced by a pronoun *they*.

### Pronoun Usage Issues

If you encounter a situation where there are two pronouns in a sentence or a noun and a pronoun and you're not sure which pronoun case to use, try leaving out the other noun and see what makes sense. This happens a lot, especially with *me* and *I*. For example:

"Bobby and me wanted to go out for ice cream."

What if Bobby didn't want to go? Would you say, "Me wanted to go out for ice cream"? Not unless you were pretending to be a caveman. The correct pronoun to use in that example would be *I*. "I wanted to go out for ice cream." Now invite Bobby back into the sentence, "Bobby and I wanted to go out for ice cream." Ta-da! No more caveman talk.

Now here's an example where *I* is incorrectly used:

"The usher gave programs to my friend and I."

Leave the friend out of it and you have, "The usher gave programs to I." Really? That doesn't sound right. "The usher gave programs to me" would be the correct version. Bring the friend back in and you have:

"The usher gave programs to my friend and me."

Now *this* is correct. Sometimes what is grammatically correct may sound awkward until you become used to it. Apply the test, see what happens, and go with that answer.

### Types of Pronouns

There are three main types of pronouns: subjective, objective, and possessive.

When a pronoun is **subjective**, it just means that the pronoun is serving as the subject of the sentence:

"She is going to the mall."

*She* is who or what the sentence is about so *she* is a subjective pronoun.

**Objective** pronouns are used as the objects of verbs or prepositions:

"Maggie's family was hosting a foreign exchange student and Maggie looked forward to meeting her."

In this sentence, *Maggie* is the subject of the sentence so the *her* that refers to the foreign exchange student becomes the objective pronoun.

**Possessive** pronouns are the pronouns that show ownership or possession:

"My keys are on the kitchen table."

In this sentence, *my* is the possessive pronoun because it identifies the owner of the keys.

Although there is a long list of pronouns, it's important to use real ones and not make up your own versions. When converting between number or person, make sure that you are changing the nouns correctly. Here is a chart to show the changes each pronoun undergoes when shifting between subjective, objective, and possessive:

| Subjective | Objective | Possessive |
|---|---|---|
| I | me | my/mine |
| you | you | your/yours |
| he/she/it | him/her/it | his/her(s)/it(s) |
| we | us | our(s) |
| they | them | their(s) |
| who | whom | whose |

Pronouns *this, that, these, those,* and *which* do not change form; they are the same whether they are acting as subject, object, or showing possession.

"Please give the ball to her."
"Whose dirty socks are these?"
"We will plan the trip together."
"Give your brother his train."
"I think that is their lost dog."
"That is the lucky hat I was looking for."

**Reflexive pronouns** are used when the object and the subject of a verb are the same; a reflexive pronoun is used for the object. Reflexive pronouns are the ones that end in *self* or *selves* (*himself, herself, itself, themselves,* etc.). Take the next sentence as an example:

"Marty pinched himself in disbelief."

If you change the reflexive pronoun *himself* into one of the three standard types, you change the whole meaning of the sentence:

"Marty pinched him in disbelief."

This sentence makes it sounds as though Marty can't keep his hands to himself and he is pinching another person. That is far different from pinching himself.

## Verb

Verbs are the words used to name **actions, feelings, or a state of being**. After nouns, verbs are probably one of the most plentiful parts of speech in the English language because every noun has to *do* or *be* something, which requires verbs. Although they are plentiful and found in every complete sentence, verbs can be tricky when you try to use them. Verbs have all sorts of exceptions to rules and how to use them can get confusing. Hopefully, the following tips will help you sort things out when it comes to verbs.

## Types of Verbs

There are many different types of verbs. This section includes some examples of the types of verbs you will probably come into contact with on tests and in your writing.

### Action Verbs

Action verbs are just what they sound like: they show specific action or movement (*run, walk, dive, stop, jump, do,* etc.) There are two types of action verbs: transitive and intransitive.

- **Transitive verbs**: show action but include a direct object (someone or something receives the action of the verb being done). For example, "My dog brings me my slippers." In this sentence, *brings* is the verb and *me* is the direct object who benefits from the dog's bringing action. Or, "Brad offered Jenna a seat at the lunch table." In this sentence, *offered* is the verb and *Jenna* is the direct object.

- **Intransitive verbs**: show action that does *not* require a direct object. "The boy shouted in anger." We don't know who or what he is shouting at, but we can understand his action of shouting. And, "The rain fell bleakly over the city." In this sentence, *bleakly* is an adverb explaining how the rain fell and there is no need for a direct object.

### Helping Verbs

Helping verbs are used together with a main verb to show the verb's tense, to form a negative, or to ask a question. Helping verbs can also add emphasis. Forms of the verbs *have*, *do*, and *be* are the most common types of auxiliary verbs.

- Sheri *should have* told her mother the truth.
- Sam *does not* remember setting his alarm.
- Ryan is going *to be* living in his parents' basement until he's 40.

One specific type of helping verb is a **modal**. Modals express ability, possibility, obligation, or permission to do something. The most common modals in English are: *will*, *would*, *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *shall*, *should*, *must*, and *have to*.

### Verb Tenses

Verbs are words that can be used to describe actions or feelings that happened in the past, are happening right now in the present, or might happen at some point in the future. Depending on what point in time a verb is referring to, you have to conjugate it differently. While there are three *main* categories of tenses (past, present, future), there are other variations within each one.

And this is where your mind may be saying, "Aggghhhh! I do not get this!" Relax. Here is a quick rundown of the six tenses you may use in writing and speaking. It is not important to be able to name the tense you use, but it *is* important to use the right tense *and* not to mix tenses inappropriately in one sentence.

*Note:* A **participle** is a word formed from a verb but which is being used as an adjective or a noun. A participle is used to make compound verb forms. Participles can be *present* (ending in *ing*),

or *past* (usually ending in *ed* or *en*). For example, for the verb *walk*, the present participle is *walking* and the past participle is *walked*. Irregular verbs have varied past participles but present participles always end in *ing*.

| Tense | Use of the Tense | Forming Tense/Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Present** | to tell what is happening now; to express actions that are habits, repeated, or regular; to express general truths, emotions, or feelings; to give directions | main form of verb<br>**walk, walks**<br>*She walks to school.*<br>*They walk to school.* |
| **Past** | to tell what happened before the present moment in time | main verb + *ed*<br>**walked**<br>*She walked to school yesterday.* |
| **Future** | to refer to a time later than this moment and to express fact or certainty | *will* or *shall* + main verb<br>**will walk, shall walk**<br>*She will walk to school tomorrow.* |
| **Present Perfect** | to connect past with present and denote actions that have taken place in the past and are still taking place now | a form of *to have* + past participle of main verb ( – *ed* or irregular form)<br>**has walked, have walked**<br>*She has walked to school every day so far.* |
| **Past Perfect** | to express an action that has been completed in the past | past tense of *have* (*had*) + past participle of main verb<br>**had walked**<br>*She had walked to school when she was in first grade, too.* |
| **Future Perfect** | to express an action that will be completed in the future | *will have* + past participle of main verb<br>**will have walked**<br>*By June, she will have walked to school* 180 *days.* |

### Common Confusion in Verb Usage

There are several verbs that often cause errors in subject-verb agreement. Among the most commonly confused (and misused) verb forms are:

**lay** and **lie**—*Lay* means to put or place something somewhere. *Lie* means to either recline or to not tell the truth.

**sit** and **set**—*Sit* means to be seated or to come to a resting position. *Set* means to place something somewhere.

**rise** and **raise**—*Rise* means steady movement upward. *Raise* means to cause to rise.

As a result of these differences in meanings, using the right word and the right form of the word becomes very important to the meaning of your sentence. Here's how three commonly-confused words *should* be conjugated from present to past to past participle:

| Present | Past | Past Participle |
|---|---|---|
| **lay/laying**<br>Lay the baby in her crib.<br>She is laying the baby down. | **laid**<br>This morning, I laid the baby in her crib | **have/has laid**<br>Most mornings, I have laid the baby in her crib. |
| **lie/lying**<br>I need to lie down and rest.<br>I am lying down to rest | **lay**<br>Yesterday, I lay down to rest. | **have/has lain**<br>Each afternoon, I have lain down to rest. |
| **lie/lying**<br>Do not lie to me.<br>Neal is lying again. | **lied**<br>Neal lied about where he had been. | **have/has lied**<br>Neal admitted he has lied in the past. |

**Subject-Verb Agreement**

Like nouns and pronouns, subjects and verbs must agree in number and tense. That means that if a subject is **singular**, the verb that goes with it must be singular as well. If a subject is **plural**, the verb must be plural. That all sounds easy enough, but making verbs plural seems counterintuitive and writers who are not paying attention can end up with verbs that don't agree with their subjects.

**Singular Verbs vs Plural Verbs**

Singular *nouns* are easy; they are what they are, and to change them to plural, you generally just add *s*, *es*, or *ies*. Singular *verbs* (verbs that go with singular nouns), however, already have an *s* attached and it is that *s* that actually makes them *singular*. (Yes, that's weird… "singular" verbs have an *s*.) Here are some examples of singular verbs (and the list could be much more extensive):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| runs | plays | thinks |
| jumps | turns | loves |
| skips | remembers | hides |

Think of the sentence "The boy ____." All of the singular verbs listed above could fit in the blank and make sense with that singular noun (*boy*).

To make a noun plural, it's easy to add *s*, *es*, or *ies* to the end of the word and then you have more than one of whatever you were talking about
(*puppy* to *puppies*, *car* to *cars*, *sky* to *skies*, *wish* to *wishes*, *bike* to *bikes*, *girl* to *girls*, etc.). However, to make a *verb* plural, you actually do just the opposite and take the *s off* the end of the verb to make the plural verb form. Look:

"Katie skips down the sidewalk."

In this sentence, we have a singular noun (*Katie*) and a singular verb (*skips*). Notice that the *singular verb* ends in an *s*. Here are some more examples of sentences with singular subjects and singular verbs:

"Mark *takes* notes in class."
"The cat *plays* with the mouse."
"Mom *makes* dinner every night."
"Dad *carries* a briefcase to work."
"Jane *watches* her cat play."

In all of these examples, there is a singular noun and a singular verb. But when the subject becomes plural, the verb must become plural, which requires you to take *off* the -*s* at the end of the verb. Here are some examples changing our singular subjects from above into plural subjects and changing the singular verbs to plural verbs:

"Mark and Steve *take* notes in class."
"The cats *play* with the mouse."
"Mom and Aunt Karen *make* dinner every night."
"Dad and Grandpa Rick *carry* briefcases to work."
"Jane and Erin *watch* Jane's cat play."

When you take the *s* off the end of a verb, it becomes plural—just the opposite of what you do for a noun.

So, the major "take-away" from all of this is: When we say "plural verb" or "plural form of the verb," do *not* expect to see *s* or *es*. That's what you will see on a "singular verb" or "singular verb form."

**Noun Exceptions = Verb Exceptions:**

There are all sorts of exceptions to verb rules. One of them is the rule for those pesky nouns that end in *s* but are actually singular (*pants*, *scissors*, *eyeglasses*, etc.), which may trick you into using the wrong verb form. Keep in mind that even though they are singular and refer to one thing, they actually get a plural verb unless preceded by the phrase *pair of*—then they are singular and need a singular verb.

"My pants *were* wrinkled."
"My pair of pants *was* wrinkled."

"His glasses *are* on the nightstand."
"His pair of glasses *is* on the nightstand."

"The scissors *are* in the drawer."
"The pair of scissors *is* in the drawer."

**Irregular Verbs**

Just when you may have thought that verbs could not get more confusing, we introduce to you some *irregular verbs*. Verbs tend to have three parts: the **root form** (present tense), the (simple) **past form**, and the **past participle form**.

*Regular* verbs are conjugated into past tense (either simple or past participle) generally by adding *-ed* to the end of the root form (*kick* to *kicked*, *walk* to *walked*, *jump* to *jumped*, etc.). *Irregular* verbs, however, make grammatical life more complicated. Irregular verbs don't follow this general pattern but instead take on a different pattern of conjugation. Here is a list of some irregular verbs so you can see how they conjugate differently from the root form to past to past participle:

| Root | Past | Past Participle |
|---|---|---|
| eat | ate | (have, has, had) eaten |
| do | did | (have, has, had) done |
| leave | left | (have, has, had) left |
| go | went | (have, has, had) gone |
| write | wrote | (have, has, had) written |
| speak | spoke | (have, has, had) spoken |
| know | knew | (have, has, had) known |
| become | became | (have, has, had) become |
| be | was/were | (have, has, had) been |
| have/has | had | (have, has, had) had |
| break | broke | (have, has, had) broken |

*Important Rule:* One of the most obvious errors in spoken and written English involves the use of *has*, *have*, and *had* with past and past participle forms of verbs.

In the case of the past form, such as *went*, you do *not* need *has*, *have*, or *had*. For example, it is either:

"I went to the store" or "I have gone to the store," but *never* "I have went to the store."

Likewise, if you use the past participle form of a verb, you *must* use *has*, *have*, or *had*:

"I have done the laundry" *not* "I done the laundry."

Unfortunately, there is no easy-to-remember rule for identifying or conjugating irregular verbs. So make sure, if you are uncertain, that you look them up in a reputable source to make sure that you are using the correct form.

**The Role of a Verb in a Predicate**

As mentioned earlier, every complete sentence must include a subject and a predicate. The **subject** identifies who or what the sentence is about and is generally a noun or pronoun. The **predicate** is the part of the sentence that explains what the subject is or what it does. The verb (the action word or state of being) will always be located in the predicate part of a sentence. Here are some examples:

"Imelda *answered the phone*."

"The dark horse *galloped quickly around the track*."

"Anna's bright green car *is easy to find in a parking lot*."

"The school's choir performance *starts at 7 p.m.*"

"Betty *likes to drive go-carts*."

In these examples, the single-underlined portions of the sentences are the subjects and the double-underlined portions are the predicate (the part of the sentence containing the verb and stating something about the subject). These sentences all happen to be structured in a way that the complete subject comes first and then the complete predicate. When we use *complete* in this sense, it just means that all parts of the sentence are accounted for as either being a part of the subject or a part of the predicate.

You could also identify the **simple subject** and **simple predicate** by just identifying the exact noun subject(s) and the exact verb or verb phrase in the sentence. Simple subject and simple predicate for the examples above would be *Imelda* and *answered*, *horse* and *galloped*, *car* and *is easy to find*, *performance* and *starts*, and *Betty* and *likes*.

## Adjective

Adjectives **modify or describe nouns or pronouns**. Adjectives are important because they help provide details about things so that the reader can better envision what the writer is talking about. Adjectives give descriptions about which, how many, or what kind. Adjectives help describe how things look, sound, feel, taste, smell, or act and can describe size, condition, appearance, attitude, personality, quantity—the list is extensive.

Here is a before and after example of the power and importance of adjectives:

"The cowgirl rode a horse."

Okay. There are some nouns there. A reader might get a simple picture in his or her head about this sentence. But watch what happens when you add some adjectives:

"The *experienced blonde* cowgirl rode a *beautiful*, *nimble*, *chestnut-colored* horse."

Now we have more details and descriptions to help us envision what the writer wants us to see in this sentence. Except for getting lost in too many words, there is really no limit to the number of adjectives that can be used in a sentence.

In the next sentence, all of the italicized words are used to describe the underlined nouns and those adjectives help to paint a vivid picture for the reader. That's a lot of description!

"As the *bright hot midday* sun beat down on the *sweaty carefree* children running around the *inviting* playground, the *tired overworked underappreciated* teacher reluctantly rang the *loud reverberating five-minute warning* bell."

Adjectives *usually* come before the noun they are describing, though that is not always the case. Adjectives will follow forms of the verb *to be* (*am, is, are, was, were,* etc.) as in:

"The rabbit is white." (*white* describes the rabbit)
"I was sick all weekend." (*sick* describes which way I was feeling)
"They are exhausted." (*exhausted* describes which way they are feeling)
"The staircase was narrow." (*narrow* is describing what kind of staircase)

Adjectives will come *after* a sense verb or appearance verb if the noun it's modifying comes before the verb. For example:

"Bayley seems upset." (*upset* is describing Bayley, not the verb *seems*)
"The painting looks unfinished." (*unfinished* is describing the painting, which comes before the verb *looks*)
"When full, the water pitcher was heavy." (*heavy* describes the pitcher even though it comes after the noun itself)

Changing the word order of your adjectives can help create variety in your sentences. Adjectives *cannot* modify or describe verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. That is the job of adverbs. To determine whether an adjective or an adverb is needed, first figure out what part of speech the word you are trying to modify is. If it is a noun, using an adjective would be appropriate. If it is a verb, an adverb, or another adjective, it is going to need an adverb. For example:

"The runner ran *quick*."

This sentence doesn't work because the modifier is trying to describe how the runner ran, which is a verb, so it needs an *adverb*. Instead, the sentence should be written as:

"The runner ran *quickly*.)

The following sentence revision *does* work because now *quick* is describing the runner (a noun) instead of describing how he ran (a verb).

"The *quick* runner ran."

## Adverb

Adverbs **modify or describe verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs**. They answer the question of *how* something is done. Many adjectives are easy to spot because often, though not always, they are words that end in -ly. Usually, adverbs come after the verb they are modifying, but that is not always the case.

When adverbs modify or describe verbs, they explain how something is done.

"She looked at her son lovingly." (*lovingly* describes how she looked at him)
"The birds sang sweetly." (*sweetly* describes how the birds sang)
"Jack and Jill walked quickly up the hill." (*quickly* describes how they walked)
"She timidly asked for another cookie." (*timidly* describes how she asked, but in this example it comes before the verb itself)

When adverbs describe adjectives or other adverbs, they may also explain when, where, or why something is done.

"She arrived at her appointment 15 minutes late." (*late* explains when she arrived)
"The children played upstairs." (*upstairs* explains where the children played)

An adverb can also be used to enhance or intensify the word it is modifying. For example:

"I really don't care what you think." (*really* intensifies the fact that this person really doesn't care and that it's not that he just doesn't care a little bit)

"I completely understand why you are upset." (*completely* enhances the level of understanding; it's not just a little, it is full understanding)

Adverbs *cannot* modify or describe nouns; that is a job reserved for adjectives. To know whether to use an adjective or an adverb, figure out the part of speech of the word you are trying to modify or describe. If it is a noun, you should use an adjective. If it is a verb or an adjective or another adverb, you need to use an adverb. For example:

"The team behaved *bad* on the bus after their game."

This sentence is not good because the word wanting to be modified is a verb (*behaved*), but this sentence tries to use an adjective to describe it. Instead, we should write:

The team behaved *badly* on the bus after their game.

Now we have an adverb describing the verb (*badly* to describe how they *behaved*). If you wanted to use an adjective, it would be

The team's behavior on the bus was *bad*.

Now you are describing behavior as a noun instead of as a verb.

## Preposition

Prepositions are **directional words**. One way to look at them is as words that describe what a fox can do to a box. Prepositions show relationships between things in a sentence, how one thing relates to another in terms of location, time, or movement. Here are some examples of prepositions (but there are a lot more):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| above | down | over |
| about | from | since |
| across | in | through |
| around | into | to |
| at | near | toward |
| behind | of | under |
| below | on | upon |
| beside | onto | with |
| by | opposite | within |

"The fox was sleeping *under* the box."

"The fox walked *toward* the box."

"The fox lay *upon* the box."

"The fox tripped *over* the box."

**Prepositional Phrase**

Prepositions start prepositional phrases which are **phrases that begin with a preposition and end with the object or noun** of the phrase. Prepositional phrases act as **modifiers** (like adjectives and adverbs) and give more explanation about a subject (namely, its relationship to something else in the sentence). For example:

"He sat *under the tree* reading a book."

In this sentence, the italicized portion is the prepositional phrase. It begins with a preposition (*under*) and ends with the object of the phrase (what he was sitting under—the *tree*).

Here are some more examples of sentences with prepositional phrases:

"Jane left her book *on the table*."
"Joe did his homework *at his desk*."
"Please sit *opposite your partner*."
"Walk *toward the light*."
"Lola hit the volleyball *over the net*."

**Of vs Have**

The preposition *of* should never be confused with the verb *have*. This is often a problem when using phrases with *could*, *would*, and *should*.

"Lana could *of* gotten accepted to Harvard if she'd studied more in high school." (incorrect)
"Lana could *have* gotten accepted to Harvard if she'd studied more in high school." (correct)

"She realized she should *of* brought a jacket." (incorrect)
"She realized she should *have* brought a jacket." (correct)

## Conjunction

Conjunctions are **joining words**; they bring words, phrases, clauses, and sentences together. They **link parts of a sentence** into a cohesive whole and help to create sentence length variety so that every sentence isn't a simple sentence. There are three different types of conjunctions: coordinating, correlative, and subjunctive.

**Coordinating Conjunctions**

The easiest way to remember the most common conjunctions, called *coordinating conjunctions*, is to remember the acronym **FAN BOYS**. It stands for the seven coordinating conjunctions, which join together words, phrases, and independent clauses:

- **F**or: explains purpose or reason ("Alex leaves the light on at night, *for* she is afraid of the dark.")
- **A**nd: adds a word, thought, or idea to another ("Please put your shoes *and* socks away.")
- **N**or: presents an alternative negative when another has already been stated ("Heather does not like softball, *nor* does she like volleyball, but she loves to play lacrosse.")
- **B**ut: shows contrast or exemption ("The movie was good, *but* the book was better.")
- **O**r: shows a choice or alternative ("We can have pizza *or* cheeseburgers.")
- **Y**et: introduces a contrasting idea or statement; means "but at the same time" ("I always intend to stay awake for the whole movie, *yet* I seldom make it past the first twenty minutes.")
- **S**o: provides a conclusion, effect, result, or consequence ("Zane cheated on his math test, *so* he earned a zero.")

When you use a conjunction to join together two independent clauses, you must also use a comma before the coordinating conjunction. Note that many of the examples above have that comma.

Generally speaking, coordinating conjunctions do not come at the beginning of a sentence. Technically they *can*, but it requires a very specific sentence structure in order to be grammatically correct. It's best just to wait to use them later in a sentence.

**Correlative Conjunctions**

These conjunctions **work in pairs** and both must be used for the sentence to make sense. The most common correlative conjunction pairs are:

- *either/or* (Charlie will buy *either* the necklace *or* the earrings for his mother.)

## Capitalization

Capitalization refers to the use of capital (upper case) letters at the beginning of certain words. Correct capitalization is important because it shows a certain level of education and understanding. If you don't follow the rules of capitalization correctly, your writing may be unclear, childish-looking, and unprofessional, causing people to question your intelligence or your credibility, or both. The rules for capitalization can get a little bit tricky. Some capitalization guidelines might contradict the other, as various rules may exist in one specific aspect, depending on the writing/editing style guide being used. For example, the Associated Press Stylebook and the Chicago Manual of Style have opposing rules for capitalizing long prepositions (outside, between, etc.) in titles of publications—and all styles have exceptions to every rule. No matter which style you follow, the key is consistency. Here, we provide some generally accepted rules and tips that should help you remember when and what to capitalize.

### Beginning of Sentences

Capital letters always **start a new sentence**. For example:

- The dog ran across the lawn.
- We visited our dad at work.
- Although she was tired, Alyssa made dinner at home.

Capital letters are also used when **starting a new sentence within a quote**. For example:

- Lauren shouted to her mother, "Can you please bring me a towel?"
- Ed thought to himself, "Maybe I will ride my bike tomorrow," but quickly changed his mind.
- "Please pick up your socks," my father scolded.

Capital letters are *not* used, however, if the quoted text is not a complete sentence or if it is just a phrase or term. For example:

- The movie critic claimed the film was "all fluff" and "not an Oscar-contender."

### Titles

Capitalization in book, poem, movie, song, or other publication titles can be tricky. *Most* of the words in titles *are* capitalized. So, capitalize every word of a title *unless* it falls under one of these **exceptions**:

- Do not capitalize articles (*a*, *an*, *the*) unless they are the first word in the title.
- Do not capitalize coordinating conjunctions (*and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *so*, *yet*) unless they are the first word in the title.
- Do not capitalize short prepositions (less than four letters, such as *by*, *on*, *in*, *up*, *of*, etc.) unless they are the first or last word in the title.

- All other words in the title should probably be capitalized and you should **always capitalize the first and last words** in the title.

**Nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs should always be capitalized** in titles. **Verbs** (or action words) should be capitalized as well, and these include *Is* and *Are*.

- Fame Is the Spur

Here are some examples of properly capitalized titles (note that all first and last words are capitalized, but none of the articles are unless it starts the title):

- Beauty and the Beast

- How to Change a Tire

### Events and Periods of Time

*Specific* events or periods of time should always be capitalized. They are considered proper nouns (specific names for one-of-a-kind things). So one would capitalize *World War II*, the *Civil War* (notice we didn't capitalize the article "the"), the *Middle Ages*, the *Renaissance*, and the *Great Depression*. One would *not* capitalize century numbers like the *eighteenth century*. Art periods also fall into the category of needing capitalization. Here are some examples:

"We learned about the Egyptian pharaoh King Tut who ruled during Egypt's New Empire Period."

"Mary discovered that her grandfather served in World War I."

"The fifteenth century was a time of great exploration by the Europeans."

### Acronyms

Acronyms are abbreviations formed by using the first letter of each word in a title or phrase. For example, NASA is an acronym for the <u>N</u>ational <u>A</u>eronautics and <u>S</u>pace <u>A</u>dministration, the acronym uses **all capital letters**.

### Calendar Terms

If something can be found on a calendar, it should probably be capitalized. Calendar terms include:

- Days of the week (*Monday*, *Tuesday*, *Wednesday*, *Thursday*, *Friday*, *Saturday*, and *Sunday*)

- Months of the year (*January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November*, and *December*)

- Major holidays (*Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Kwanzaa, Christmas, Passover, Ramadan,* etc.)

### Cities, Countries, Nationalities

Because they are **proper nouns**, the names of cities, counties, states/provinces, and countries are capitalized. The names of people from those countries are also capitalized. Consider these examples:

"Dana is from Bournemouth, Dorset, England."

"Can you find Uzbekistan on a map?"

"I visited Chicago last weekend."